

The sense of the people

*Politics, culture and
imperialism in England, 1715–1785*

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Introduction: The people, towns and politics in eighteenth-century England

[Who dares call] the Voice of the People . . . Faction? . . . Is not the Sense of the Inhabitants of London, Edinburgh, York, Bristol, Salisbury, Worcester, Gloucester, and many other principal Towns, besides those of several Counties, to be esteem'd the Sense of the Nation?

Salisbury Journal, Feb. 5, 1740

As a statement about the status of urban opinion in the political process, this query was both rhetorical and contentious. The anonymous writer in the *Salisbury Journal* was arguing from the premise that eighteenth-century towns served as the most reliable barometers of the political views, sensibilities and grievances of "the people," and as such constituted the "sense of the nation." Such a claim would become a standard conceit among provincial urban political polemicists over the course of the eighteenth century, just as it had been for the journalists and supporters of the City of London during the political upheavals of the Stuart period. But its status as an ideological construct, designed to impart weight and universality to a particularized political position, should not prevent us from taking it seriously. For the claim to represent the "sense of the people" became an important legitimizing rhetorical strategy in the Hanoverian decades, a crucial part of the wider political contestation under way that had been produced by the emergence of a vibrant, national and predominantly urban extra-parliamentary political culture. It is the purpose of this book to examine both the development of that political culture and its ideological content: to contextualize its claims to national and populist significance with reference to the political issues its participants embraced and the social, cultural and ideological environments which gave them meaning. I hope to demonstrate, in the process, the ways in which the vibrant

extra-institutional political culture of provincial towns and London created an alternative idiom of political discourse that could be used by a wide range of groups to claim a stake in national affairs.

Such an enterprise may appear to be both brash and impertinent, given the rich and resourceful scholarship that has characterized the field of Hanoverian political history for the past two decades. Recent studies of popular politics, class relations, crime and the law have done nothing less than revolutionize the ways in which we view and interpret the expression and exercise of power in eighteenth-century English society, and the means by which authority was transmitted, negotiated and resisted.¹ The theater of the street and square, the associational life of the tavern, the productions of press and pulpit, and the symbols and rituals of the crowd have been, as a consequence, pushed to the center of the historical stage, throwing up a rich and complex picture of what politics and authority meant for the majority of eighteenth-century English people. Our notion of the "political" has been correspondingly liberated from its high-level straitjackets to include a broad range of social, cultural and symbolic practices that challenged, as well as maintained, the parameters of power.

However, both inevitably and appropriately, the studies of the last two decades have raised as many questions as they have answered. In particular, the social provenance, autonomy and ideological significance of out-of-doors political activity remain matters of vigorous debate. Edward Thompson has argued that the protest traditions of plebeian culture offered the only viable opposition to the weak, if overgrown, patrician power structures of the age; John Brewer has emphasized the crucial role of the bourgeoisie in both supporting and resisting state expansionism and strength. For the earlier period, the work of Nicholas Rogers and Linda Colley has challenged claims about the rapidity and

¹ See esp. John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), "English Radicalism in the Age of George III," in J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions* (Princeton, 1980), 323–67, and "The Number 45: A Wilkite Symbol," in Stephen B. Baxter, ed., *England's Rise to Greatness: The Tory Party, 1714–1760* (Cambridge, 1982); Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1975); Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1992); Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989); and E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?" *Social History*, 3 (1978), 123–65, and *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York, 1991).

novelty of political change after 1760 while also producing disparate visions of the sources and supports of opposition politics.² Equally important, the contributions of the extra-parliamentary nation to the political discourses and practices of the day have not been systematically considered, and by design or default the impact of earlier popular political traditions on the content and composition of radical and loyalist politics in the reign of George III remains almost wholly unexplored.³

Above all, perhaps, the paucity of provincial urban political studies remains a serious lacuna in eighteenth-century scholarship. Indeed, in contrast to the Stuart period – and despite ample evidence that the “urban” was fast becoming multi-centered in pre-industrial England – the nature and distinctiveness of political culture in the localities have only just begun to be investigated.⁴ The vast majority of studies of Hanoverian political culture have focussed on London, and although the potential importance of provincial politics has been acknowledged, the assessment of its viability has been based upon the metropolitan example and usually a rather uncritical acceptance of the City of London’s own rhetorical claims to political singularity and national leadership. Rogers has argued, for example, that the “resilient tradition of civic participation” capable of sustaining a “genuinely popular political culture” was

specific to the City [of London] . . . Many provincial towns lacked this structure of politics, or where it existed in a formal sense there was an absence of political will or civic consciousness to put it into effect. Consequently, provincial politics was extremely susceptible to the management of local elites.⁵

Yet in this period provincial towns were the primary beneficiaries of

² For the works of these scholars see note 1; see also John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York, 1989).

³ One exception to both of these statements is Paul Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People* (Cambridge, 1989), although he focusses exclusively on Jacobitism.

⁴ Earlier and more recent investigations include John Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands* (Montreal, 1977); Thomas Knox, “Popular Politics and Provincial Radicalism,” *Albion*, 11 (1979), 224–41; John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790–1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Frank O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989); and James Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁵ “The Urban Opposition to Whig Oligarchy, 1720–60,” in M. Jacob and J. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (New York, 1984), 141–2. Rogers retreats from this position somewhat in his recent work but still insists that London provided the main force in the anti-oligarchic politics of the period: *Whigs and Cities*, 7, 399–403 and *passim*.

economic and imperial expansion and improvements in communications, building, publishing and internal trade, experiencing the most dramatic upheavals in population growth and cultural refurbishment and taking increasingly strident roles in national agendas.⁶ Such far-reaching changes produced broadly based provincial political publics, engaged by issues emanating from the state and focussed on national affairs; and it was upon the mobilization of this wider community that London's claims to national leadership rested. Clearly, the 'rise of the provinces' in negotiating the stability of the Hanoverian state at home and abroad occurred long before the 1790s, or indeed the 1760s, and the political interests, grievances and sensibilities of these provincial urban publics need to be addressed.⁷

This study demonstrates that the political and cultural vitality of provincial towns was central to the viability of extra-parliamentary politics. In the following pages, I examine the development of political culture in urban localities from the accession of George I to the post-American war period, in both a national context and with special reference to Newcastle upon Tyne and Norwich. Without ignoring London, I am concerned to contribute to the recovery of the national dimensions of urban politics in the eighteenth century, which cannot be extrapolated from the metropolitan example alone. At the same time, I seek to illuminate three crucial and related aspects of eighteenth-century politics which have been neglected in most histories: first, the *content* of urban politics, and particularly the impact of empire and state-building on political ideologies and the sensibilities of ordinary citizens; second, the roles of populist and patriotic ideological constructions in shaping, galvanizing and legitimating extra-parliamentary political culture; and third, the role of provincial urban culture itself in supporting and furthering extra-parliamentary politics, or, to put it another way, the political significance of the 'urban renaissance' of Hanoverian towns.⁸ Through these avenues, I hope to indicate some of the complex ways

⁶ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989); P. J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982); Peter Clark, ed., *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns* (London, 1984); Geoff Eley, 'Re-Thinking the Political: Social History and Political Culture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain,' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 21 (1981), 427-56.

⁷ The phrase is John Money's: 'Samuel Pipe-Wolferstan and 'The Confessional State,' '' *Albion*, 21 (1989), 406-7; cf. J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁸ The phrase is Borsay's: See his work cited in note 6.

in which political ideas were disseminated, consumed and transformed, and to demonstrate that urban political culture was an instrument of cultural and political struggle that both mirrored new social hierarchies and refashioned the parameters of political debate. In the remainder of this introduction, I wish to do three things: outline the sources and supports of urban political robustness and change in the eighteenth century; describe the conceptual approach and methodology of this study; and place my subject and its treatment in the context of the historiographical debates to which they are addressed.

I

For our purposes, the term “urban” is used to refer to settlements of about 2,500 or more inhabitants, as towns of this size were most likely to be capable of sustaining the resources, structures and personnel of extra-institutional politics. A definition based on population size is somewhat arbitrary, as early-modern urban historians have hastened to point out.⁹ In towns of all sizes and legal statuses, politics in a formal sense was always more concentrated and immediate than in rural environs: Not only were they the sites of parliamentary and local elections, but urban communities, as larger settlements with religiously and ethnically diverse populations and greater potential for disorder, required more concerted government, more administration and more vigorous presentations of authority, which engaged residents in a more politicized world. And as the English state grew over the course of the century, so too did the number and diversity of its representatives in provincial towns, giving central government a more salient presence in the localities.¹⁰ However, although all communities could have complex and vital political lives, it was urban settlements with over 2,500 inhabitants – accounting for just under 20 percent of the population in England and Wales at the beginning of our period and just over 30 percent at the end – that were most likely to sustain the infrastructure of extra-parliamentary political culture; they provide the main focus of this study.

⁹ For debates over categorizing the urban see Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 4–5; Corfield, *Impact of Towns*, 1–16.

¹⁰ Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, chaps. 3–7; J. V. Beckett, “Land Tax or Excise: The Levying of Taxation in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century England,” *EHR*, 100 (1985), 306; and for the colonies, Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness and the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1979), 26–53.

Even this largely political conceptualization of the urban, however, needs to be further refined. What was "urban" in the eighteenth century should not be perceived as antagonistic or oppositional to the rural, for in many ways town and country complemented each other and shared both resources and population. Provincial towns in large part were service centers for their increasingly capitalized agricultural and industrial hinterlands; seasonal employment and migration meant that many people would spend part of their lives working in urban settings; and most humble country dwellers were as likely to have recourse to the services and markets of provincial towns as the gentry were to take advantage of their recreational and cultural amenities.¹¹ Further, if "urban" is not to be regarded in this study as the antonym of "rural," neither is it to be taken as a synonym for "modern." For most of the century, urban life, even in London, was clearly a mixture of traditional and dynamic elements; but it was essentially no more transient, anonymous or capricious than life in the hamlets and villages of the countryside in a period of rapid population growth, protracted wars, imperial expansion and growing regional economic specialization and interdependence. In both town and country, people's daily lives were linked together, in varying degrees, by church, parish, neighborhood, tavern, workplace, craft and family, and were influenced by trade cycles, the state of public credit, good and bad harvests, price and wage fluctuations, and war and peace.¹² Similarly, many aspects of eighteenth-century political culture were common to village and countryside as well as to city and town. The smallest country inn not infrequently got the "prints" from the capital and larger provincial towns and could serve as the center of political information and gossip; political propaganda and electioneering were as integral aspects of county as of city political life; and both county and borough electorates were drawn from villages and hamlets as well as cities, with the unrepresented market and industrial towns contributing substantial numbers to both.¹³ In other

¹¹ E. A. Wrigley, "Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period," in R. I. Rotberg and T. K. Rabb, eds., *Population and History: From the Traditional to the Modern World* (Cambridge, 1986), 123-66; Peter Borsay, "Urban Culture in the Age of Defoe," in Clyve Jones, ed., *Britain in the First Age of Party: Essays Presented to Geoffrey Holmes* (London, 1987), 24-40. By midcentury, over half of the English labor force worked in nonagricultural employments; by 1800, over two-thirds did so: Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 181.

¹² Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989); Jeremy Boulton, *Neighborhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987).

¹³ As Frank O'Gorman has recently made clear in *Voters, Patrons and Parties*.

words, there was a "national" political culture in the eighteenth century shared by country and city alike. This study, for reasons of time, space and interest, focusses on its manifestations and consequences in towns, and especially on those larger towns with sufficient resources, personnel and communications to maintain diversified political opinions.

With this definition in mind, the examination of urban political culture in the Hanoverian decades throws into question many of the most cherished orthodoxies about the eighteenth-century political system, in both its electoral and nonelectoral aspects. In the first instance, the larger provincial towns provided the most solid base of oppositionist and anti-oligarchic politics throughout the century. Large urban constituencies were the engines of the anti-Walpolean campaigns and the radical agitations under George III, providing an increasing number of contests and an increasing proportion of the urban electorate. They thus exerted counter-currents to the tides of Whig predominance and electoral ossification so evident elsewhere in the nation, and particularly in the smallest boroughs and counties, where the number of electoral contests fell drastically in the first five decades of the century.¹⁴ Even in 1754–84, a period renowned for its electoral quiet, between half and two-thirds of the large urban constituencies went to the poll at each general election – demonstrating a rate of contests comparable to that exhibited during the "rage of party" earlier in the century. Clearly, the Septennial Act and Commons committees were not as effective as has been assumed in stifling the political interest and combativeness of the voters.

Continuing electoral vitality, however, was only one aspect of the burgeoning political culture of provincial towns in which all ranks of citizens participated. Indeed, electoral evidence, excluding as it does the vast majority of the population, is a wholly inadequate gauge of

¹⁴ If one takes into account the expansion (from 28 in 1701–13 to 35 in 1754–84) and changes in the hierarchy of boroughs of 1,000 or more electors ranked by size, the number of contests rose steadily, from 78 in 1701–13 to 94 in 1715–47 to 116 in 1754–84. These boroughs were also two to three times as likely to be contested at a general election as the smaller boroughs; their voter turnout was the highest, regularly reaching 90%; and their proportion of the urban electorate grew from 49% in the first period to 66% in the last. See Donald R. McAdams, "Electioneering Techniques in Populous Constituencies, 1784–1796," *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 14 (1972), 23–53; John Phillips, *Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England* (Princeton, 1982), 68–70. My calculations are based on tables in John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640–1832* (Cambridge, 1973), 280–9, Namier and Brooke, i, 515–20, and Sedgwick, i, 117–22.

the extent of popular political involvement.¹⁵ Quite simply, Hanoverian provincial towns proffered a wider array of sources and supports for political activity and consciousness than had their Stuart predecessors. To recognize this is not to have recourse to facile models of “modernization,” but to acknowledge the diverse structures, both old and new, of political expression and debate within eighteenth-century English society (which also confound the dichotomous models of “early-modern” and “modern” society wielded by historians of the period). The traditional civic culture of most towns continued to provide many of the sites and contexts for the political involvement and awareness of ordinary citizens. Political and religious ideas and controversies were disseminated in churches and chapels, in lively ward or parish politics, in the taverns and alehouses that were well-integrated aspects of the provincial urban landscape by the early 1700s, and in the street theater and spectacle attendant upon civic and state anniversaries throughout the Hanoverian decades.¹⁶ Moreover, although this period witnessed a decline in the proportion of the wealthiest citizens who took out the freedom of incorporated towns and agreed to take on the burdens of civic office, the lower levels of town and parish government, as well as broad areas of law enforcement and administration, continued to be staffed by middling and plebeian residents – tradesmen, craftsmen and artisans – who correspondingly were integrated into an ever more complex local state and who kept in close contact with local political authorities and issues.¹⁷

Over the course of the century, traditional civic culture was increasingly supplemented by the effervescence of the urban renewal, or “renaissance,” which unfolded, albeit unevenly and sporadically, in many

¹⁵ The idiosyncratic nature of borough franchises and the exclusion of women means that electoral statistics greatly underestimate the numbers engaged by contemporary political culture. Between 1 in 4 and 1 in 6 adult males had the vote over the eighteenth century, but this varied greatly on the local level: See for the first estimate Derek Hirst, *The Representative of the People? Voters and Voting in England Under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1975), and for the second, Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, 30.

¹⁶ For the seventeenth century see Tim Harris, Paul Seward and Mark Goldie, eds., *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (Oxford, 1990); Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II* (Cambridge, 1987); Gary De Krey, *A Fractured Society: The Politics of London in the First Age of Party* (Oxford, 1985); David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985).

¹⁷ Henry Horwitz, “Party in a Civic Context: London from the Exclusion Crisis to the Fall of Walpole,” in Jones, ed., *Britain in the First Age of Party*, 173–94; see also Chapter 6.

provincial towns in the first three-quarters of the century, and this had a number of significant repercussions for urban politics. Economic, demographic and imperial expansion, the solidification of a national market, the swelling ranks of the middling sorts, and developments in communications, transportation, building and the press all contributed to the emergence of a distinctive provincial culture that significantly altered the face and texture of urban society. As regional and local economies became more complex and specialized, urban society more intricate and cultural amenities more sophisticated, economic and social relations became organized as much by market forces and competition as by aristocratic and gentry patronage, by cultural aspirations and the pursuit of status as by vertical ties and dependencies. As such, elite clientage, extended to a diminishing proportion of local tradespeople, became less capacious and effective as a means of political control.¹⁸ There was greater cultural and social space, in other words, for townspeople to perceive themselves as independent political subjects. These developments were, paradoxically, reinforced by high political developments within the oligarchic state, as continuing divisions among the parliamentary elites, along with exigencies prompted by war, invasion and rebellion, resulted in appeals to those out-of-doors for support and the introduction of new techniques and arguments designed to mobilize the extra-parliamentary nation.

Secondly, the assemblage of socioeconomic, cultural and political changes that contributed to a provincial urban vitalization also provided many of the structural supports for the wider politicization of ordinary residents. The expansion of the press and the spread of print culture – that is, the spread of both the artifacts of the press and the institutions and types of sociability that subsidized it – were, of course, enormously important in disseminating political values and attitudes, promulgating not only information but also ideologies which proffered particular and often divergent interpretations of the nation, empire and polity. In addition, the cultural refurbishment of provincial towns stimulated the emergence of a proliferation of associational activities – from the building of new cultural arenas like assembly rooms, theaters and hospitals to the formation of a multitude of clubs and societies for self- and public improvement – that had in themselves political implications. Drawing individuals together for cooperative and convivial activities and providing new contexts and settings for political action, the ‘urban

¹⁸ See Chapter 1.

renaissance" itself could become a source of contestation and conflict in some communities, and could stimulate or embody political divisions. Provincial urban culture thus furnished some of the crucial formal and informal venues for middling and artisanal involvement in civic and political affairs.

Given the inequities of the eighteenth-century electoral system, it is the analysis of this "alternative," partially extra-institutional and variously accessible political culture, first pointed to by Brewer but never examined systematically in provincial towns over the century, that will be the main focus of this study. For it is in this wider political world that the richly expressive diversity of Hanoverian political activity and the cultural, social and ideological dimensions of contemporary notions of political community can begin to be recovered. Accordingly, "political culture" is defined here as the realm encompassing political values and ideologies, the *forms* of their expression – verbal and non-verbal, embodied in both actions and artifacts – and the mechanisms of their dissemination and transformation. It thus includes both formal and informal activities, from street theater, club life and print culture, to instruction and petitioning movements, demonstrations and reforming campaigns – that is, the various modes of political expression and communication in which virtually all classes had a stake.¹⁹ What follows constitutes but one provisional mapping of a rich and robust terrain.

II

Eighteenth-century urban political culture was clearly predicated upon a wide-ranging "media," one that ranged from the press and pulpit to the streets, theaters and taverns of London and provincial towns; it is here that political ideas, ideologies and propaganda found their widest audience. In its very accessibility, contemporary political culture mitigated the harsher aspects of the oligarchy that had been hardening in the formal institutions of the state since the Hanoverian Succession. And by linking individuals in the localities with broader national and even imperial developments, it made more and more individuals aware

¹⁹ The term "popular" is used, like "populist," to describe language or arguments that are supported by, or that champion the rights of, "the people" in political debate and activities. Except where so designated, it is *not* used as a synonym for "plebeian" but is meant to include the middling classes. Hence, my examination of "popular politics" is an investigation of socially inclusive or accessible forms of political activity.

of the impact which state policies and decisions had on their everyday lives and prosperity, and familiarized them with discourses that diagnosed the structure, location and distribution of political power in the state as the source of many social and economic, as well as political, discontents and blessings. Urban political culture thus posed both practical and ideological challenges to the customs and values of patrician society.

The examination of extra-parliamentary politics equally raises conceptual problems for the historian which have to be addressed. Because Hanoverian culture exhibited such a *mélange* of traditional and transformative elements in both the structural and ideational spheres, the dichotomous models typically used to explain it have become problematic. Elite versus popular, high versus low, patrician versus plebeian and “deferential” versus “autonomous” are some of the oppositions commonly employed to give form and meaning to popular politics in this period. The elite-versus-popular dyad, for example, has permeated a wide range of scholarly work on demotic political activity and protest, as on early-modern culture generally, from the skillful deployment of the Gramscian concept of hegemony by Edward Thompson to the rather more unwieldy commercialization model of cultural change developed by Neil McKendrick and J. H. Plumb.²⁰ Yet the oppositions contained within these models not only elide or exaggerate the role of the middling classes in the culture and politics of the day, they also, more important, conceal the marked degree to which cultural forms were circulated among and shared by different social groups, despite the often divergent meanings they may have had for each of them. It has been convincingly demonstrated for early-modern France, Holland, Scotland and England that cultural transmission and dissemination depended far less on the emulation of elite culture or the domination of metropolitan cultural forms than on the “appropriation” of various cultural artifacts and activities by different classes in specific contexts. Cultural objects and practices were, in a word, polysemic, and their meanings were contingent upon the social environments in which they were used.²¹ Such a multivalent perspective is

²⁰ Thompson has argued that such a characterization of his work is misleading: *Customs in Common*, 87–96. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London, 1982); Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978); Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations and English Society 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1977).

²¹ For the concept of appropriation see Roger Chartier, “Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France,” in S. L. Kaplan, ed., *Understanding Popular Culture* (Berlin, 1984), 229–53, and *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early*

particularly valuable in interpreting eighteenth-century political culture, when both extra-parliamentary politics and partisan conflict depended upon shared, if conflicting, ideologies, values and apprehensions and the access of all social groups to the means of public political communication.

Similarly, the assessment of popular politics solely in terms of conformity to elite party divisions (and thus its "deferential" or "autonomous" nature) has led to a number of conceptual blind alleys which it is my purpose here to avoid.²² Implicit in such approaches are the assumptions that the political choices of ordinary people were the product of *either* autonomous political consciousness *or* elite domination, that economic clientage blocked the formation of ideological interpretations of political issues (or, alternatively, allowed individuals to see their "real" economic interests with perfect clarity), and that elite party identities were capable of both defining and containing political meaning and thus the form and content of individuals' larger political consciousness. They provide, in other words, a view from above and so cannot recover the mental universes of politics for those outside the structures of the state. Above all, these models ignore the larger discursive contexts in which "party" identities were produced. The competing constructions of state, nation, empire and patriotism that were deployed by propagandists and parliamentary orators alike were never the exclusive preserves of specific parties, but were used by contending groups in a variety of contexts with very different purposes in mind. Moreover, the tangible impact which popular political loyalties and sensibilities had on those above, the ability of middling and lower-class

Modern Europe, trans. Lydia Cochrane (New York, 1984), 6-7; for other examples of its historical operations see Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, eds., *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, 1993); Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988); Jonathan Barry, "Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century Bristol," in Barry Reay, ed., *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1985), 56-84; Martin Ingram, "Ridings, Rough Music and the 'Reform of Popular Culture' in Early Modern England," *P & P*, no. 105 (1984); Nicholas Phillipson, "Scotland," in R. Porter and M. Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981), 19-40; Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (London, 1981).

²² Hence in psephological analysis "genuine" political involvement is demonstrated by consistent party voting from election to election, whereas "imposed" political loyalty, deference or apathy is demonstrated by switching parties or abstaining altogether: See the analyses in W. A. Speck, *Tory and Whig: The Struggle in the Constituencies* (London, 1970), and J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985), chap. 1. Cf. Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), 121-34.

people to sustain or initiate political action on their own,²³ and the diverse ways in which political ideas entered public consciousness all militate against a straightforward "party" interpretation of extra-parliamentary political culture in the Georgian decades. In the public culture of the period, political articulacy lay in the eye of the beholder, and political consciousness was a many-splendored thing, forged as strikingly through the involvement of individuals in localized contests for power as through participation in national movements that aimed at ousting a minister or reforming the state.

This study proceeds from recognition of the existence of a political culture whose means of communication were widely if not equally accessible, based on public cultural forums, diverse expressive modes and shared, if heterogeneous, values. Questions about the "authenticity" or "autonomy" of political loyalties will be given short shrift in favor of questions about the meanings and significance of politics for ordinary people. To begin to uncover these meanings it is necessary to take seriously the ideological content and contexts of extra-parliamentary politics over the century.²⁴ In doing so I take cues from three sources: the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, whose analysis of discourse as "an event," a site of historical change and cultural formations, has radically altered historical studies; such historians of political thought as J. G. A. Pocock and Richard Ashcraft, who have argued that political ideologies are forms of "self-understanding" that flow through a variety of media and supply the standards that make specific social actions meaningful; and Stuart Hall, whose recognition of the discursiveness of ideology, where meaning lies in "the articulation of [its] elements," has demonstrated its material force and consequences in late-twentieth-century Britain.²⁵ Given that

²³ A point demonstrated by Gary De Krey in "London Radicalism After the Glorious Revolution," *JMH*, 4 (1985), 591-7.

²⁴ "Ideology" is deployed in this study to mean the ideas and values which structure political thinking and give shape and content to political consciousness; while appearing unified and coherent, ideologies are always unstable, contested and under construction. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Essays on Ideology* (London, 1971), 1-60.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in Robert Young, ed., *Writing the Text* (London, 1982), 48-78, and *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York, 1978), 17-34; J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1985), 75-6; Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's "Two Treatises of Government"* (Princeton, 1986), 5-6; Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London, 1988), 9-10. "Discourse" is used in this study to denote public and organized ways of speaking about constituted